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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

Review of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information pursuant to resolution 51/138 B of 13 December 1996. In paragraph 8 of that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review the publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development.

2. In accordance with the above request, the emphasis of the present report is on Africa Recovery, Development Business and Development Update, the Department's main periodical publications dealing exclusively with development issues. In addition, the development-related contents of its two other regular publications, UN Chronicle and Notes for Speakers (now entitled UN Briefing Papers), are briefly reviewed.

II. AFRICA RECOVERY

3. Africa Recovery grew out of Africa Emergency, a quarterly publication of the former United Nations Office of Emergency Operations in Africa. When this office closed in late 1986, there was still strong support from both within and outside the United Nations system for its Africa publication, which had developed strong communication links with many of the continent's key supporters in the media, non-governmental, governmental and donor communities. Since the General Assembly, in a special session, had just adopted the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (General Assembly resolution S-13/2 of 1 June 1986) - the first ever and only General Assembly programme directed at one particular region - the Department decided

that it would develop a new publication oriented towards African economic development issues. Africa Recovery was first published in April 1987 with extrabudgetary support from the Department, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Steering Committee for the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development. The decision to produce an Africa-oriented publication reflected the high priority attached to African development by the General Assembly, as well as by the Secretary-General.

4. Since its start in 1987, the focus of Africa Recovery has been on building international awareness of the continent's critical economic situation, the steps being taken by African countries themselves to alleviate the crisis and the support being given to these efforts by the international community and the United Nations system. The format has been refined over the years and now includes many more charts and tables that contain key information about the continent's economic development.

5. Africa Recovery has been funded under the Organization's regular budget since 1990 under subprogramme 3, The campaign for global awareness of the critical economic situation in Africa, of programme 45, Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, as revised.[1] The legislative authority for the subprogramme derives from several General Assembly resolutions, including resolution S-13/2 (adoption of the Programme of Action) and resolution 46/151 of 18 December 1991 (adoption of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa).

6. Since 1990, the Department's Africa Recovery Section has had two Professional and two General Service regular budget posts: an Editor/Chief of Section (P-5), a Deputy Editor/Information Officer (P-3), an Editorial Assistant (G-5), and a Secretary (G-4). For the past eight years, UNICEF supplied the funding for an extrabudgetary Managing Editor post (P-4). UNICEF, however, recently informed the Department that after February 1997 this funding would no longer be available. Extrabudgetary funds are also used to pay for a General Service (desktop publishing) post and for additional temporary Professional staff needed to help write/edit the publication. The 1996-1997 regular budget revised appropriation for the Section was US$ 1.09 million, while $250,000 was allocated to the Section in 1996 from the Africa Recovery Trust Fund.

7. Africa Recovery is published four times a year in English and French. The Section also produces other information materials (two major information kits and a briefing paper in 1996, for example), while carrying out numerous other tasks associated with the general mandate to raise global awareness of the African economic crisis. The target audience has always been and remains the media, key opinion-leaders and decision makers in the Government, aid and donor communities, as well as leading non-governmental organizations and academics. Approximately 30,000 copies of each issue (some 23,000 in English and 7,000 in French) have been distributed worldwide since the publication's inception in 1987. Currently, about 16,247 copies are distributed to individuals, institutions and organizations that have requested them, with the majority going to Africa (5,485), North America (5,377) and Europe (4,229). Another 12,251 copies are distributed mainly through UNDP field offices and United Nations

information centres around the world. The remaining copies are distributed to offices at Headquarters and to permanent missions in New York.

8. The extensive mailing list of the Africa Recovery Section, which is regularly updated, includes separate priority categories for major international and African media that allow the Section to disseminate information materials to them in advance of general distribution. Up until September 1995, the Section had an extrabudgetary General Service staff member working full time on the mailing list, but owing to declines in extrabudgetary contributions, that post was not filled when it became vacant. Africa Recovery is distributed free of charge to its primary audience, since the Section's clear mandate is to disseminate information on Africa's economic situation as widely as possible. However, about 300 recipients send contributions to the Africa Recovery Trust Fund for the magazine.

9. Africa Recovery was one of the Department's first publications to be designed on a desktop publishing system (since 1990). All photos are now scanned and placed on computer disk along with print files of the publication, which results in significant cost savings at the external printing stage.

10. In seeking to heighten awareness of Africa's critical economic situation, Africa Recovery focuses on the key themes of African development highlighted by the General Assembly, in a manner consistent with the concerns of the United Nations New Agenda for Development of Africa. These themes range from international developments that have repercussions for Africa's economic and social situation, including United Nations global conferences, the consequences for Africa of international trade liberalization after the Uruguay Round and the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO), to the efforts of African countries themselves to improve domestic policies and achieve effective implementation. Specific issues include debt, development aid and foreign direct investment, as well as regional economic integration and South-South cooperation. Africa Recovery also plays an important role in disseminating information on the various forms of support that the United Nations system gives to the continent's economic and social development efforts. Africa Recovery gathers the relevant information from a wide range of sources within and outside the United Nations system, then analyses and presents it in an accessible manner to its broad readership, from a United Nations perspective.

11. Because of the publication's unique mandate to focus on a single world region and the range of issues it covers, there is no editorial overlap with other United Nations publications. On the contrary, 81 per cent of the respondents to a readership survey conducted by the Department in 1994 stated that Africa Recovery provided them with information not regularly available in any other publication.

12. The impact of Africa Recovery in raising awareness about the African economic crisis has been repeatedly noted in several programme evaluation reports. In an independent in-depth assessment of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa conducted by UNDP in 1993, the evaluators stated that the periodical was read by both donors and recipients, that its articles were impartial and to the point, and that it had been highly recommended for how it had exposed the problems of African debt. An appraisal of the United Nations

Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development conducted in 1991 referred to Africa Recovery as a high quality informative magazine and cited it as an excellent example of what can be done for the sensitization of appropriate audiences, through dissemination of appropriate information.

13. In this connection, the 1994 survey by the Department of Public Information indicated that its highly educated and professional readership described Africa Recovery as very useful in diverse ways. Indeed, 73 per cent of respondents said they used the publication in their professional work and as a reference source. Many described it as an indispensable education tool and the most useful single source of information on Africa's economic development needs. It should be noted that the real readership of Africa Recovery is substantially higher than is indicated by its print-run of some 30,000 copies. Over half the respondents in the 1994 readership survey said that on average, up to four other people read their copy of the publication. In order to make it easier for even greater numbers of people to have access to the publication, Africa Recovery articles will soon be regularly available through the United Nations Internet website.

14. Africa Recovery's articles and editorials have been instrumental in alerting the media to the nature of Africa's economic crisis and the actions being taken to overcome it. These materials have been reproduced in numerous African newspapers and magazines, as well as in various publications with worldwide circulation, such as The Economist, the Financial Times, the Guardian, Le Soir, The New York Times and The Washington Post. In 1988 and 1992, Africa Recovery won the Judge's Prize in the World Hunger Media Awards. It shared this award with The Atlantic Monthly, Newsweek, The Washington Post and the Cable News Network. No other United Nations periodical has won this award.

15. Finally, perhaps the most telling indication of support for Africa Recovery's impact has been the substantial extrabudgetary support it has received from various United Nations agencies and development organizations. Over the past 10 years, more than $3 million has been donated to the Africa Recovery Trust Fund.

III. DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

16. A self-financing publication entering its nineteenth year, Development Business provides bidding information on development projects financed by the United Nations and the world's leading development banks, including the World Bank. Development Business assists developing countries to procure goods and services at internationally competitive prices and thus to maximize the purchasing power of their development credits and loans. It also serves private sector firms in both the developed and developing countries by publicizing opportunities for them to compete for billions of dollars in international contracts each year. The publication sells for $495 per year and appears twice a month. The Department's Development Business Unit provides faster and more selective access to project information via Scan-a-Bid, an on-line service.

17. The Department launched Development Business in 1978 with the support of the World Bank and the African, Asian, Caribbean and Inter-American Development

Banks. At present, all of these institutions require their borrowers to advertise bidding opportunities related to bank projects in Development Business. In 1992, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development also chose Development Business for its borrowers; the North American Development Bank came on board in 1995. Development Business is the only publication worldwide that pulls together procurement data on all of the major development banks. It is the Department's only periodical with a substantial private sector audience.

18. The founders of Development Business envisioned it as a means of attracting competitive bids from private sector firms interested in supplying bank-financed projects throughout the developing world. Governments that borrowed from the five founding development banks would receive free space to advertise their invitations to bid; the banks would provide related project information; and the private sector firms that bid would finance the venture via paid subscriptions.

19. With $21 billion in loans in fiscal 1996, the World Bank is the largest source of project financing published in Development Business. From the mid-1980s, the Department and the World Bank published almost identical World Bank procurement information and competed for subscribers. As of 30 June 1995, the World Bank and the Department signed a two-year agreement that converted this competitive relationship into a cooperative one. The agreement is currently being renegotiated; included for discussion is a possible joint venture to create an Internet version of the publication.

20. Development Business satisfies the needs of several audiences. By publicizing contracts up for bid on projects financed by the development banks, it assists the developing countries and those in transition to market economies to purchase goods at internationally competitive prices. As the service is provided free of charge, Development Business saves borrowers hundreds of thousands of dollars in advertising fees each year. In addition, the publication advertises projects financed or executed by the United Nations, helping the Organization to obtain competitively priced goods and services.

21. Development Business also alerts private sector firms in the developed and developing countries to opportunities to do business in the developing countries. In fiscal 1996, for example, the World Bank made payments in excess of $9.4 billion to firms supplying bank projects, including companies from China, France, Germany, Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Non-governmental organizations also read Development Business to obtain project information.

22. According to a readership survey conducted in 1994, most Development Business subscribers found the publication a valuable resource that served their needs. The publication received high grades from those surveyed for content, timeliness and usefulness. Over 70 per cent of the respondents contacted the project executing agency of the developing country listed in Development Business for more information. Between 45 and 68 per cent requested bid documents, over 50 per cent submitted a bid or proposal as a result of receiving Development Business, and more than 25 per cent won contracts based on information in the publication.

23. The Development Business Unit derives its income from the sale of the publication, the Scan-a-Bid on-line service and advertising space. The Unit continues to generate cash surpluses, which are being used to build a reserve fund mandated by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.[2]

24. Development Business adheres to a strict twice-monthly publication schedule. A one-year subscription consists of 24 issues of a tabloid-size newspaper, which includes 28 monthly summaries of projects pending loan/credit approval (12 summaries of World Bank projects, averaging 106 pages each in 1996; 12 summaries of Inter-American Development Bank projects, averaging 48 pages each, and four summaries of African Development Bank projects, averaging 16 pages each).

25. The publication's on-line version, Scan-a-Bid, is available through the Knight-Ridder Agency, with which the Unit has a revenue-sharing agreement. The Development Business databases sell for $90 per hour for connect time and $1.31 per retrieval (documents displayed or printed by the user).

26. The print-run for Development Business averaged 6,000 copies per issue in 1996. Worldwide, 45 per cent of subscribers are located in Europe and Central Asia, 33 per cent in North America, 10 per cent in the Asia and Pacific region, 6 per cent in Central/South America and the Caribbean and 6 per cent in Africa. Subscription order forms appear in each issue of Development Business. Recent back issues are sent in response to inquiries.

27. Of the publication's current 3,637 subscribers, only 292 receive it free of charge. Bulk copies are sent to the development banks to be used by task/project managers, country directors and procurement officers. They are also used to promote the publication at bank seminars. Copies are distributed free of charge to United Nations information centres, field offices of UNDP, and other agencies and programmes of the United Nations system.

28. The procurement information published by Development Business is supplied by the banks and other institutions whose information appears in the newspaper or by the developing country government agency responsible for the project. The newspaper's articles focus on business trends in the developing countries, including privatization, private sector involvement in infrastructure projects and changes in the investment climate. Articles also appear regarding the development activities of the banks and the United Nations. These articles are written by journalists whose work also appears in The New York Times, the Financial Times, Institutional Investor and Business Week.

29. Additionally, the newspaper includes a two to three-page advertising section entitled "The International Business Guide"; procurement sections for each financing/executing institution containing invitations (in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese) to bid on contracts financed or executed by the banks and the United Nations system, including UNDP, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Office of Project Services; and announcements of contracts awarded.

30. The newspaper's supplements contain a list of development projects under consideration by the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development

Bank and the World Bank. Project entries, listed by region, country and economic sector, differ by bank but tend to include the government agency to be contacted for more information and the goods and services likely to be procured.

31. The staff of the Development Business Unit consists of an Editor (P-4) and a trilingual (English, French and Spanish) Copy Editor/Production Manager (P-3). There are six General Service staff in New York and two in the Washington office. The Editor sets the publication's policy with respect to quality and content and writes for Development Business, in addition to administering, planning and supervising the Unit's work. The Editor prepares and manages the Unit's $1.4 million annual budget, with the goal of maximizing output while holding down costs. This includes working with staff to see that successful production, marketing, advertising and client-servicing procedures are observed and outdated ones changed. The Editor coordinates the activities of the in-house staff and the external typesetting firm, the printer (no capacity exists in-house), the mail handler and the mailer. Outside firms are procured by competitive bidding and monitored closely for quality and timeliness. The Unit's internal typesetting needs are satisfied by desktop publishing.

32. In meeting the specialized information and international publication needs of its worldwide audience, as well as in terms of its scope, periodicity, timeliness and self-financing nature, Development Business is not similar to any other United Nations publication. The 1994 readership survey revealed that more than 60 per cent of respondents filed or kept some or all of the publication for future reference, between 45 and 50 per cent routed some or all of it to others in their organization and about one quarter placed it in a library or information area. Almost one third of subscribers were presidents, chief executives, executive vice-presidents or corporate officers; more than one quarter were in export sales or business development; and approximately 15 per cent were in professional, scientific, technical or library-related disciplines.

IV. DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

33. Development Update, an eight-page bimonthly periodical, provides succinct, authoritative and current information on the development work of the United Nations system in an easy-to-read format. It is the only publication to provide timely systemwide coverage of United Nations initiatives in the development field.

34. Its coverage includes reports about the deliberations on the United Nations agenda for development and on the work of the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO. New United Nations economic and social publications are reviewed, and there is coverage of the Organization's assistance programmes in such diverse fields as health, infrastructure, new technology, the advancement of women, criminal justice and government administration. Interviews with leading United Nations figures, including Presidents of the General Assembly, leaders of global conferences, agency heads and high-level officials, technical experts and diplomats representing groups such as the Group of 77 or the European Union, clarify and enliven these issues. A useful regular feature is a calendar of current and upcoming United Nations development-related events.

35. The publication was begun in January 1994 to raise awareness about the issues relating to the cycle of international development conferences being held by the United Nations during the 1990s. Since then, Development Update has expanded its coverage to include major development-related activities of the United Nations system.

36. Initially, Development Update was financed entirely from temporary assistance funds made available to the Department for the promotion of the cycle of development-oriented international conferences. More recently, it has been absorbed within the Department's regular budget. Rather than having specialized staff solely dedicated to its production, the publication is produced by one Professional staff member who, in addition to other duties, acts as Editor/ Writer. Desktop composition, proofreading, distribution and other related functions are carried out by various staff members of the Development and Human Rights Section of the Department. This keeps costs low, while ensuring that the staff working on the publication are fully conversant with development matters.

37. The content of Development Update is determined by a departmental editorial advisory group. The group clears the final text and layout before sending it for internal printing, which is in two colours. The Editor proposes the contents of each issue and researches and writes the articles on the agreed-upon topics. The Editor finalizes the placement and length of articles for each issue, working with the desktop publishing assistant, before final review by the editorial advisory group. The periodical is published in English only.

38. Despite its limited size and simple format, the modestly resourced Development Update has generated considerable interest among traditional United Nations audiences, including policy makers, media, academic and research institutions and non-governmental organizations. Supportive and complimentary messages are regularly received via postal and electronic mail, and the publication's growing influence is indicated by the willingness of high-level policy makers to be interviewed for news stories. The print-run of Development Update is 20,000. Bulk copies are distributed to United Nations information centres and UNDP and other United Nations field offices for local dissemination. United Nations information centres report interest in the publication, and some have designed special distribution for people of national influence. It is also distributed throughout the United Nations system and to United Nations Associations, and United Nations depository and other libraries.

39. Although it has not been promoted or advertised, Development Update, which is distributed free of charge, has compiled a wide mailing list for subscriptions that have been received since publication began in 1994. The readers come from a range of organizations: universities, corporations and investment firms, development assistance programmes, student groups, community organizations, research institutions and periodicals, including such mainstream media as The New York Times and the Asian Wall Street Journal. A recent analysis of the regional composition of the mailing list is as follows: Africa, 16 per cent; Asia, 15 per cent; Europe, 20 per cent; North America, 22 per cent; Central/South America and the Caribbean, 17 per cent; and Western Asia, 10 per cent.

40. Development Update is posted on the United Nations home page on the Internet. In addition, it is electronically distributed to United Nations information centres prior to the printing and distribution of hard copies.

41. An editorial redesign of Development Update is currently under consideration. The objective would be to make the publication a vehicle for opinion and debate among leading development voices, while maintaining its current function as a source of development news. This would involve soliciting original manuscripts, as well as conducting interviews and arranging debates and similar activities that could be used as the basis for articles and extended question-and-answer features. One possibility under discussion is to devote each issue largely to a single topic.

42. Other aspects under review are the feasibility of introducing photographs and making more extensive use of graphics, as well as publication on a bimonthly schedule, changes in typography and format, simultaneous production in French and the potential of Development Update as a sales item. However, these discussions presuppose that substantial additional resources would be allocated to Development Update, and in the current financial situation, this is not assured.

V. OTHER RECURRENT PUBLICATIONS

A. UN Chronicle

43. Since its inception as a monthly in 1964, the Department's quarterly magazine UN Chronicle has had a long-standing tradition of coverage of the Organization's activities in the sphere of development. In 1996 alone, the publication carried cover stories on the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and on the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, as well as major articles on the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Solar Summit, and the World Food Summit, while providing follow-up coverage of issues related to previous global conferences. Other development-related articles published during 1996 related to: the effects of desertification on development and environment; an essay by the Administrator of UNDP on development cooperation; reports on the activities of UNCTAD, ILO, WFP and other development-oriented programmes and agencies; and efforts to assist public administration and financial management capacities in developing countries.

44. In addition, the UN Chronicle has introduced a number of new sections that regularly include development issues. One such section, "UNreported", considers United Nations field activities and issues, and has included stories on the Organization's development projects in various Member States. Another new occasional section, "HealthWatch", focuses on health issues, including ones primarily affecting the developing world.

45. The magazine has also continued its regular coverage of development-related actions of the General Assembly, in particular those of the Second and Third Committees, and of the Economic and Social Council, as well as its review of books from within and outside the United Nations system which often concern development issues.

46. In its efforts to reach out to a wider audience and increase its subscription base, the UN Chronicle has agreed with the Sales and Marketing Section to put its redesigned contents pages on the United Nations home page, and to include a link to the Sales and Marketing Section that would facilitate subscriptions. It is also exploring the possibility of including "hyperlinks" on the magazine's contents web page to several important articles in each issue.

B. Notes for Speakers

47. Notes for Speakers, now entitled UN Briefing Papers, is an annual publication, which on a number of occasions in recent years has produced issues dealing specifically with development themes. The publication was first issued in 1989 to provide a resource for speakers and others engaged in public outreach. As originally planned, the annual series would alternate issues providing a general review of the work of the Organization in priority areas with issues devoted to a particular theme. For example, Notes for Speakers were produced on the themes of environment and development in 1991 and human rights in 1993. Since 1995, there have been editions on social development and the advancement of women (both timed to coincide with the major conferences on these issues) and on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, which provided information on the Organization's overall achievements in the key areas of its mandate - peace and security, development, human rights and international law.

48. The present edition, due to be published in early 1997 under its new title, UN Briefing Papers, is on the world conferences, and therefore focuses very much on the key development issues that have been addressed in the recent cycle of major conferences. Each issue of this publication runs to between 80 and 100 pages.

49. The publication is produced in English, French and Spanish and is printed internally. The editorial rationale of the series is to provide relevant and concrete information on the Organization's achievements in particular areas of its work for use by United Nations officials, non-governmental organizations, academics and the media. Drafting requires a careful selection of material, in close consultation with the substantive offices concerned, and presentation in a reader-friendly language and format designed for speedy retrieval of information. In addition, the series provides ancillary information, such as an extensive bibliography of relevant United Nations publications. The current edition on the world conferences has relied entirely on internal research, drafting, formatting and printing, in order to keep non-staff costs at a minimum. French and Spanish translations still entail external costs.

50. The series is the result of an assessment of the needs of those engaged in public outreach, making use of United Nations information centres and the Public Inquiries Unit, which runs a Speakers' Bureau, for feedback. The publication has proven very popular. Between 10,000 and 15,000 copies of the English edition are printed and 5,000 each of the French and Spanish. Because of high demand from United Nations information centres and non-governmental organizations, additional press-runs were required for the English versions of the editions on the advancement of women and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. Dissemination is mainly through United Nations information

centres and other United Nations field offices, with additional direct distribution in-house and to the media, non-governmental organizations and individual speakers and researchers. Recent editions have also been made available on the United Nations home page.

51. Over the last year, there has also been a growing sales interest in the publication, at least for the English language version. In consultation with the Department's Sales and Marketing Section, the name of the series was changed to UN Briefing Papers to make clearer its relevance to a wider audience, particularly university-level students, with a view to increasing sales. To further broaden the appeal of the publication, and taking advantage of internal desktop technology, the design has also been enhanced with the use of illustrations. The successful promotion of the series may require larger print-runs. The changes do not involve any additional production costs. The editorial approach to the series also remains the same. Free copies will continue to be distributed through the network of United Nations information centres.

52. Titles for forthcoming issues in the series are still to be determined, but subjects under consideration include a general review of the work of the Organization in priority areas and the issue of reform of the United Nations.

C. Other publications

53. In addition to the above periodicals, the Department, as the focal point of the public information tasks of the United Nations, generates a wealth of information on development issues within its regular programme of work. This information is presented in different print formats, such as backgrounders, booklets, books, brochures, fact sheets, press kits and reference papers. Some of the development-related issues covered by these publications during 1996 included the following: women, homes and communities; the impact of armed conflict on children; partnerships for urban environment; United Nations action against poverty; protecting the global environment; poverty and development; population and urbanization; and public administration and development, to name a few.

54. To conclude, it should be noted that many of these publications, together with the contents of all periodicals reviewed in the present report, are frequently translated or adapted by United Nations information centres into various language versions to meet the needs and preferences of their local target audiences.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/47/6/Rev.1).

[2] See A/CN.1/R.1162 of 4 November 1992.